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NOTRE DAME DE L'EPINE, CHALONS, FRANCE.

THE beautiful edifice which bears the title of *Our Lady of the Thorn*, is situated at about five miles distance from Chalons-sur-Marne, and its strange old architecture forms a strikingly picturesque object in the scene, more like some luxuriant tropical plant than a mass of stone. The legend connected with its origin is simply told. In 1419 there stood upon that very spot a little chapel, surrounded by trees, and dedicated to St. John the Baptist. One night, as the story goes, when the shepherds were returning with their flocks from the neighbouring pastures, a bright light shone upon them; the sheep were terrified, and shrank away, but the lambs made straight for the holy place. It was the Feast of the Assumption. The shepherds, in surprise, followed the lambs, and lo, in the centre of the bright glory, they beheld an image of the Virgin holding the infant Jesus in her arms. As the night went on, the light grew brighter, and for miles and miles away was noticed with amazement.

So the priests of Meletto and the Bishop of Chalons, as soon as they heard of the occurrence, hastened to the spot, and among the thorn bushes outside the chapel of the Baptist, they discovered a small stone image of the Virgin; this they conducted with great pomp into the sacred building; and from that time the chapel became a place of great resort; there the richest offerings were presented, and at length Charles VI., of France, granted his royal letters patent for the erection of a church—a building, say the chroniclers, in every way befitting the miraculous appearance it was designed to commemorate.

At that period, a great part of France was under English rule. It was not then an idle boast when British sovereigns quartered with their arms the lily of St. Louis. The period was not far removed from the days of Joan of Arc. An English architect, whose name was Patrick, was employed to erect the new church, and under his direction the work proceeded with great rapidity. The façade, the nave, and the chief tower were soon completed, but the fortune of war gave that part of the country into the hands of the French, and the English being compelled to retreat, the architect took flight, and, alas! for the beautiful structure, carried off with him the funds intended for its completion.

Antoine Guichard proceeded, after some delay, with the work, and under his direction the church was rendered still more beautiful than any one had anticipated. They had resigned the work into Guichard's hands, rather than employed him to carry out the design of his predecessor; but the new architect modified the old plans, and by those modifications considerably improved them. In 1529 the church was finished. Nothing could exceed the enthusiasm of the people; the altar was crowded with costly gifts, the people of Verdun and Chalons gave a splendid window of stained glass—a window, by the way, which the fortune of war completely shattered a short time afterwards.

In the Revolution of 1789, five of the bells were melted down and converted into money, and one of the stately towers deprived of its spire and turned to new account by being made the station of the telegraph. In 1825 it sustained some accidental damage, but this was speedily repaired. The church is a truly beautiful specimen of the architecture of the fifteenth century. The entrance is admirably designed and exquisitely finished. A distinguishing feature is the fine and arcade-like aisle, which at the entrance rises upward like a pyramid, and is ornamented by a very large crucifix. The two bell towers are elaborately finished; the work of the old sculptors is as fresh and sharp as ever; and the rich tracery says much for the taste and judgment of those ancient artists. Viewed from without, the appearance of the church is remarkably beautiful; within, the beauty is still greater; and looking on the lofty pillars, on the rich tracery, on the sculptured roof, on every object that tells of bygone glory, our thoughts go wandering into the past, and we think of the mailed knights and mitred prelates, whose steps once echoed in those lofty aisles, but who have long ago been laid to sleep, while all their glory has passed away.

POPULAR ERRORS, PREJUDICES, AND SUPERSTITIONS.

A VERY singular popular error, is the belief in the DIVINING-ROD. This rod, it was formerly supposed, was capable of pointing out the position of minerals in the earth, of hidden springs of water, and even capable of manifesting the guilt of criminals, and discovering stolen property. It is, however, no longer used in the latter capacity, the advance of knowledge having led men to require stronger proofs against an accused party than could be furnished by the divining-rod; but it is even yet employed here and in some other parts of the world, as a means of ascertaining the presence of water or metals. The divining-rod is a forked stick, generally of hazel, the limbs of the fork measuring about eighteen inches each; and about a quarter of an inch in diameter. To use it the diviner grasps the extremity of the limbs, one in each hand, the palms being turned upwards and the fingers inwards towards the body. Moving cautiously and slowly onwards step by step, with the rod held in this manner, the diviner on becoming aware of the action of hidden power, tightens his grasp of the fork; but, in spite of this, and though the bark is frequently wrenched from the rod in the struggle between the influence of the force which bears it downwards, and the efforts of the holder to keep it tight—in spite of this, we say, the limbs of the rod become bent outwards, and ultimately the head of the fork points perpendicularly downwards to the spot where the metal or the water is supposed to lie. Now, that the rod really does turn in this manner is beyond all question, no end of persons having testified to their having witnessed it; and that it acts thus in the hands of men whose character prevents the least suspicion of imposture, is an equally well-established fact. These men have tried it, and, as we have said before, found the green bark fairly wrenched off in their endeavours to prevent the rod from turning in their hands. What, then, is the cause of this action of the rod? Some authors have attributed it to magnetism and electricity. But the only probable solution of the mystery we have yet met with is that given by an American writer—when we say a solution of the mystery, we, of course, allude only to the cause of the rod's motion; as to its pointing to water, &c., that is simply a superstition. The explanation given appeared in a number of Professor Silliman's "American Journal of Science." The writer tells us how he witnessed the action of a divining-rod, which, held in the hands of a boy, distinctly traced out the course of a subterranean stream which was accordingly marked out as he went along. However, upon the boy being blindfolded, and led about from one part of the field to the other, although he frequently passed over the course of his newly-discovered spring, and though the rod kept continually pointing down in different places, it never pointed out the same spot twice; and the whole grass-plot was covered with marks until the course originally pointed out seemed completely lost. This looked very like an imposture on the boy's part. The writer, however, on a subsequent occasion, took the rod himself, and holding it in the diviner's manner, approached the bank of a rivulet, when, to his extreme astonishment, he began to feel the limbs of the rod crawling round, and saw the point turning downwards in spite of all the efforts his clenched hands could make to restrain it. So great was the struggle between the opposing forces, that he found the bark wrenched off the limbs of the rod, just as the diviners declare it sometimes happens. And yet, instead of its being really a contest, it is the very tightness and vigour with which the rod is held which alone causes it to move. He explains it thus:—Take the rod in the diviner's manner, and it is evident that the bent limbs of the rod are equivalent to two boughs tied together at one extremity; and when bent outwards they exert a force in opposite directions upon the point at which they are united. Held thus the forces are equal and opposite, and no motion is produced. Keep the arms steady, but turn the hands on the wrists inward an almost imperceptible degree, and the point of the rod will be constrained to move; and if the limbs be clenched